

*Richard Feldstein*

## INTRODUCTION I

By the end of the 1980s the first phase in the reception of Lacan's work by the English-speaking audience drew to a close. This stage presented numerous introductions to Lacan's writing that both defined basic concepts like the big Other, *petit objet a*, desire, and *jouissance*, and contextualized them in relation to each other. Because most of Lacan's seminars have not yet been translated for the Anglo-American audience and since his concepts do not easily lend themselves to intellectual comprehension, other texts will no doubt surface to redefine basic terminology and founding principles. Nonetheless, in the 1990s, we have entered into a second phase in the transmission of Lacan's work. In this stage, some writers continue to develop basic concepts that have proved confusing, while others concern themselves with the cultural connotations of Lacanian analysis. The recent exploration of multiculturalism has induced a second look at Lacan's work. Spearheaded by philosophical and literary activists like Slavoj Žižek and Juliet Flower MacCannell, this second wave of transmission applies Lacan's theories to cultural studies—to issues of race, gender, and class that help to delineate the boundaries of the new

psychopolitical movements that are a part of the cultural ethos of our time.

*Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics* is part of the second phase in the dissemination of Lacan's thought through the cultural field. In this volume psychoanalysts, cultural theorists, and literary critics demonstrate the relevance of the unconscious economy to the wider field of cultural studies. These writers have adopted a variety of rhetorical positions when engaging cultural issues that deal with representation, ideology, class, and gender. This volume was conceived to apply psychoanalytic cultural criticism to a broad range of political and aesthetic issues related to the legal and ideological superstructure of contemporary society. Our hope was to offer a diversified anthology to understand relevant Lacanian concepts as well as to provide a conceptual network to challenge initiated readers.

The initial part of the volume is divided into three sections, the first of which, "the politics of desire," contains essays by Slavoj Žižek, Willy Apollon, and Richard Feldstein. In these essays the writers examine the cultural dynamics of a range of political discourses legitimized by post-enlightenment bourgeois societies. Žižek, in particular, is interested in the logic of the Communist party as a carrier of the sublime body that becomes a fetish repudiating castration. According to Žižek, the political fetish presents a lack in the Other where nothing is missing. This lack guarantees a neutral knowledge or metalanguage of objective laws that enabled Stalin and his cohorts to claim factual objectivity for themselves, although their only claim to objective meaning was the performative nature of language. Apollon also questions the foundation of politicized laws that legitimize authority while repressing any investigation of "the foundation of the Law as legitimate to authorize political discourse." From this perspective, State authorities—including the police and military establishment—perpetuate a monopoly of violence in the practice of their political will as an end in itself. By repressing an inspection of the political foundation and *jouissance* related to it, the State regulates violence against those who seek to uncover the cultural fissure that comprises the lack in the Other and the monopoly of violence used to hide this lack. My own article also examines the impulse to construct a symbolic organization that evades the lack in the Other, the fissure in its cultural matrix, and the attempt to overwrite it within the framework of fantasy. I claim that the phallic implementation of political power

is accomplished in part by the phallus's presumption of privilege in marking itself as the stripe of differential structure. The State attempts to appropriate for itself power associated with the intersection of the imaginary, symbolic, and real; at this disjuncture of registers, the State substitutes a repeated insistence of its mastery over the void. In its attempt at psycho-social colonization, powerful State interests use the trick of repetition to increase their status while trying to alleviate anxiety about their not having any basis for authority other than the manipulation of images and signs to repeat their claims and insist on their privileges.

In the second section, "jouissance, desire, and the law," Juliet Flower MacCannell and Judith Roof examine non-phallic *jouissance*, which escapes the parameters of masculine representation. MacCannell's essay is concerned with the distinctions between perversion and "a feminine ethics." In her analysis of perversion, MacCannell examines Adolf Eichmann, who helped to administer The Final Solution under Hitler. As MacCannell illustrates, Eichmann's crime—bureaucratic genocide—was murder by administrative edict. Instrument of a will-to-*jouissance* that was not his own, Eichmann wished to penetrate beyond the realm of law to the source from which the law originates. Obsessed with the bureaucratic officialese that conveyed Hitler's genocidal program, Eichmann was a sadistic pervert who executed the Führer's wishes, and, in the process, became an instrument of Hitler's will-to-*jouissance*. MacCannell carefully distinguishes perverse behavior from the feminine position in which women are aligned with the Other's *jouissance*. She notes that a feminine ethics "requires itself to find the path in the signifier and have it recognized in the social." While Eichmann wanted empty, formal signifiers, a feminine ethics demands full speech linking *jouissance* to the body of the signifier.

Judith Roof is also concerned with the interaction of desire, law, and *jouissance*. Roof claims that many legal reforms instituted to ensure gender equality have not produced the desired results because there exists confusion between statutory law and symbolic laws that "treat symptoms, not the underlying gender drama" or metaphors linked to the interpenetration of desire and law. Roof demonstrates how abortion laws treat the mother as a medium rather than as a subject. One can find a parallel between the analyses of Roof and MacCannell since both demonstrate how women are relegated to mere mediums of State authorities.

According to contemporary abortion laws, the State perpetuates the rights of the invisible father who stands for the paternal metaphor, the laws of kinship exchange, and, most insidiously, the rights of fetal ownership. Roof wonders how we can balance the interests of pregnant women while we dissolve patriarchal privileges protected by state and federal laws; she suggests that we jettison the pro-choice/pro-life dichotomy currently used to challenge androcentric reproductive laws and the kinship basis of property law.

In the section "the politics of mastery," Ellie Ragland contrasts the discourse of the master with that of the analyst. She shows that, from a Lacanian perspective, love is a sign of changing discourses, and the analytic discourse is, par excellence, that which typifies this ability to make such a shift. The analyst's discourse places desire in the position of the agent and evokes in the analysand a knowledge of his or her own desire. This is especially important if we consider love is a sign that we love in the Other what we lack in the Other. In contrast, the discourse of the master reduces life to a one-dimensional experience. To the master, knowledge is conjoined with truth to emphasize cognition, perception, and consciousness, in other words, the visible domain of logically provable experience. To establish this flat perspective, the master must repress unconscious ideation. As Ragland illustrates, the master is a purposely blind master—a cognitive specialist who scans experience within the limits of perceptual boundaries, and, in this way, makes the following equation: "I am; I am knowledge, I am the one who knows." The political effects of this discourse are obvious: since this is a discourse of conscious synthesis, it exists on a base of repressed affects excluded from the narrow purview of consciousness. To the master, having is knowing, and in a capitalist culture this equation runs the risk of making the possession of knowledge an endpoint in itself.

The second section of *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics* presents a study of aesthetic representation, which invariably means a study of the dynamics of symbolization. In the Lacanian schema such a study indicates how the symbol is structured in relation to the imaginary and the real. According to Lacan's formulations, the real is that which escapes language and is experienced as affect, *jouissance*, and the death drive. Interacting structurally with the real is the representational ground of language, which includes signs (and their further division into signifiers and signifieds) used to forge a social link and form an attitude of adjustment toward what is irre-

ducible to the field of representation. The essays in the second half of the book examine the itinerary of the signifier as it combines with the imaginary to prevent the subversion of the representational field and the cultural matrix placed in relation to it. As the writers in this section demonstrate, there is both an aesthetics and an ethics of representation. The various literary, filmic, graphic, and musical texts examined here introduce combinations of aesthetic representation framed in formal boundaries to produce a theatrical inscription of discourse, the social link that binds us to an ethics enacted in relation to human-all-too-human desire.

The section titled "literary representation" is comprised of four essays. In "Othello's Lost Handkerchief: Where Psychoanalysis Finds Itself," Elizabeth Bellamy invokes Jacques Derrida's critique of Lacan when examining the psychoanalytic ur-narrative of castration. This type of Derridean critique claims that psychoanalysis finds itself in an ur-narrative as it attempts to avoid anxiety related to the displacement of the unrepresentable thing itself. Through this form of self-presencing, psychoanalysis discovers itself where the thing is no longer a thing, precisely where a narrative trace foregrounds the stand-in logic which substitutes for the lost object of desire. Bellamy diverges from Derrida's wholesale condemnation of psychoanalysis, however, by suggesting that the process of overdetermination provides "the basis for a 'new' psycho-analysis that will not 'find itself' where it has (and has *not*) already been in the past." Bruce Fink's essay on *Hamlet* offers another slant on this issue. Fink argues that the work of psychoanalysis is not simply to read into aesthetic works psychological structures that have been previously identified but to seek new psychoanalytic insights as well. By taking this position, Fink proposes a counterlogic to Derrida's critique of psychoanalysis which also provides a rationale for Fink's own reading of *Hamlet*, one that disagrees with Lacan's analysis of the fifth act. In his famous essay on the play, Lacan claimed that before the Prince of Denmark died he discovered his own desire and distinguished it from that of the (m)Other. Lacan constructed his argument upon the assumption that once Hamlet was mortally wounded he could finally separate from the Other, stop procrastinating, and enact his will. Fink diverges from this reading by suggesting that "Hamlet's time never comes," that his "time is never now" because, when all is said and done, Horatio must speak for him and plead his case before the world.

The other two essays in the section on literary representation are also concerned with death. In her analysis of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Maire Jaanus demonstrates that the protagonist Tomas recognizes his wife, Tereza, as a harbinger of death when they initially meet. For Tomas, death indicates desire associated with the infant's identification with the mother where there is the danger of absorption in the other. Tomas invokes this imaginary strategy while endlessly pursuing the *objet a*, the absent object that reappears after the symbolic cut as surplus *jouissance*. Jaanus states that, like all of Kundera's characters, Tomas lives fundamentally on the level of the drive, which has no specified object but instead circles endlessly around the absent object. This condition contributes to the death-of-love motif represented in the novel in the figure of the nocturnal butterfly that represents the unbearable lightness of being: unbearable because it refers to death, weight, and human suffering; light because it indicates flight, movement, and the metonymy of the dream image which provides us with the fundamental "truth" emanating from the unconscious.

Death also figures prominently as a motif in Elizabeth Bronfen's essay on Poe. In the final essay on literary representation, Bronfen testifies to the writer's "necrophobic misogyny" revealed in the belief that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical of tropes. For Poe beauty is spiritually akin to an ecstatic elevation of the soul, and melancholia—the most legitimate poetic topic for Poe—finds its most pronounced form in death. According to this seasoned prejudice, the corpse of a beautiful woman provides the contour of an empty surface for projection, a mirror reflection for the masculine gaze. Here the readily visible dead body becomes an object of desirability in an "aesthetic event" captured by the shift of male fantasy from the proximity of unimaginable death to the more comfortable scene of viewing.

In the later sections of the book, which present essays on musical and graphic representation, there is a continuation of the investigation between the lost object, compensatory fantasy, and the transmission of lingual signs. Peter Widmer's point is tellingly simple: music aims for that beyond human mortality, but it must enter into the realm of knowledge for us to receive it. Traditionally associated with the invisible shadow realm of Hades, music reaches for the ecstatic dimension of human consciousness. But in order to capture the lost object of desire and summon us out of self-conscious, music must "pour into the folds of abstract lan-

guage." The myth of music lies in the feat of overcoming the binary opposition of language, but any musical trance must eventually be broken because it cannot entirely shake off its linguistic dimension. Because of this inevitability, Widmer concludes, music cannot help us "attain its lost immediacy, a state eternal to the experience of time." In his essay on Dali, Hanjo Berressem emphasizes the lost object in relation to compensatory fantasy and the differing ways fantasy is read by Dali and Lacan. In Lacanian theory, the ego is the site of an imaginary alienating identification—the site of *méconnaissance*. According to Lacan, there is no pre-reflexive ego because reflection gives birth to the ego in the first place; the visual scene structures the ego, not vice versa, since the ego is a mirror-effect. While Lacan states that paranoiac hallucinatory systems represent a "symbolic expression with their own original syntax," Dali believes that being follows from the ability to hallucinate. Dali goes so far as to state, "I am because I hallucinate, I hallucinate cause I am." Dali considers himself a sane madman and sees in the paranoid image a variation of the normal hallucinatory system. For Salvador Dali the image becomes clearer at the point where it becomes more enigmatic. Seen from this perspective, it becomes apparent that Dali offers a shift in thinking: a transposition from interpretative paranoia within perception to paranoia as a signifier of perception itself.

As a counterpoint to the study of the imaginary, the section on filmic representation examines the psychotic fantasy of being delivered up to an all-powerful Other that requires—no, demands—human subjugation to its beastly demands. Danielle Bergeron shows how an alien species, the xenomorphs, invade the human terrain to create a sci-fi inversion where human beings are subordinated to another species. Once the alien creature comes on board the spaceship, humans live in terror of being reduced to objects of need for the xenomorph, mere bodily receptacles for its reproduction. In this way human beings become objects that fill in the lack in the xenomorph/Other. Bergeron stresses that the sci-fi inversion of species' dominance is equivalent to a psychotic fantasy because in psychosis the Other overwhelms the subject "by terrifying impressions, individual drives caused by the unpredictable wandering of the Thing." In her article on *Aliens*, Lucie Cantin states that the capture of the subject by the *jouissance* of the Other insists that the subject must comply with its demands. According to this logic, the human being becomes a thing of prey

in the staging of trauma's structure. For humans to survive, the thing must be externalized to create a process of separation; to defeat the thing, humans must constitute an *objet a*, place the thing within limits, and identify its boundaries. But in *Aliens*, even after the humans are separated from the xenomorph, all who came into contact with the beast are permanently marked by their non-mediated relation to the real of the Other's *jouissance*.

The final section, "cross-genre representation," presents an analysis by Catherine Portuges that weaves together an intersecting fabric of literary and filmic perspectives. Portuges tells us that Duras, who is both a writer and a filmmaker, seeks in her films "the primary state of the text, as one tries to remember a distant internal event not lived out but heard told." For Duras the text presents an adjustment of distance between memory and narration—an attempt to find the correct distance to experience the object of narration without fear or trepidation. As Portuges shows, if we come too close there is suffocation, if we get too far away separation anxiety ensues. Perhaps that is why Duras often adds two layers to her depiction of experience, literary and filmic: surrender to the cinematic transference involves a risk of entrapment and the compensatory desire to remain within the tug of the narrative, while Duras's cinema insists on narration as its *modus operandi* even as it deconstructs the audience's narrative impulse. In films like *Aurélia Steiner*, Duras introduces the narrative voice as an off-screen track of pure narration superimposed over the visual sequence, in this case, a boat on the Seine. Through this technique, the filmmaker conflates herself with the narrator of the written text. Duras speaks through Aurélia in order to create a textual locus so everything can be read, including "the empty place" in the Other.

It is this lack in the Other that so many writers in *Lacan*, *Politics*, *Aesthetics* address from varying perspectives. How this lack is denied or filled—through aesthetic technique or political manipulation—proves to be a prominent point of focus in this collection. In fact, it becomes a manifestation of form itself, of the structural attempt to negotiate lack and the surplus *jouissance* that issues from it.



# *Willy Apollon*

## INTRODUCTION II

Psychoanalysis is possible only if language is considered to be the foundation of the human. The field of representation in its entirety then becomes the realm in which the human is reduced to what can be represented, abandoning what, in keeping with Lacan, must be taken as the real—that which cannot be reduced to representation. A decisive stake in language thus becomes its foundation, what guarantees the representation of representing, or, in other words, what represents a new, adequate form. The ancients saw the roots of morality and law in that hypothesis of truth where assumed presence bore witness to the preciseness of representation. Until Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, who initiated the philosophies of suspicion, that illusion of truth dominated our thought processes.

The injury that psychoanalysis inflicts upon the representation of the human is the subversion of truth as central to knowledge, experienced as an effect of what the structure of language excludes from representation. The real, excluded from language but returning in representation as an erosion of the interior, is what Freud designates in the human as the death drive and what Lacan

sees as the paradigm of *jouissance*. What psychoanalysis after Lacan designates by *jouissance* is that part of satisfaction lost for the living speaking beings, not because it is prohibited, but because the loss is logically implied in the structure of inadequacy of the language to the real.

The inadequacy of the object of demand to the object of need leaves stranded an undecidable portion of need-satisfaction, which returns indefinitely in every quest of the drive and whirlwind of fantasy. That portion of impossible *jouissance* over and above prohibited satisfaction is what Lacan refers to as *objet petit a*, the cause of the subject's desire and the final identification with its truth in fantasy. The reintroduction of the subject into every consideration of things human is the constant wound, termed the plague by Freud, that psychoanalysis inflicts upon every science of humanity.

Any such problematic in the relationship of humanity to truth subverts the entire field of representation. What subsequently emerges is no longer the relationship of representational truth to the real insofar as the real is what is focused on by representation. The real is now the *jouissance* left stranded owing to language, and representation is the representation of the real. Representation thus becomes the special mode whereby an impossible *jouissance* is the object of an irreducible quest, "in spite of" and/or "over and beyond" what organizes itself as a prohibited modality of *jouissance* in this field of representation. A prohibition such as incest or parricide is what founds the social link as a loss and debt to pay to derive satisfaction from the social link. The psychoanalytic discourse reduces the field of representation to this articulation of the prohibited and impossible as a cultural and historical delimitation of the possible for a given social group. A knowledge about *jouissance*, whose reckoning is a logical function of the prohibition founding the social link, is therefore introduced by the psychoanalytic discourse into the real of the human.

Taken from the standpoint of the psychoanalyst who assumes this knowledge of what is creating the cause in the social link, we maintain that the subversion of the representational field is not without consequence to political and aesthetic thought. Our claim emphasizes and founds the extension of psychoanalysis into the various disciplines in which reintroducing a subjective problematic into scientific consideration is essential if the human is not to be reduced simply to something that can be managed, a set of re-

alities constituted by science. The extremes in the field of social representation—politics and aesthetics—may consequently be moved closer to one another.

### politics as a structure of repression in the field of representation

Politics makes a promise it cannot keep. Would that have something to do with the fact that the field of representation from which politics draws its credibility cannot deal with the realities it espouses without deforming and losing some part of them? Both the loss and deformation sustain the dimension of deceit embodied in politics, and what the media imagines and constantly searches for, without ever realizing it, fuels their desire to know about the jouissance of politics. Doubtless then, the representation of politics must strictly be considered an aesthetic, where the inescapable stakes of the loss are asserted in the criticism of the unkept promise and in the questioning of jouissance attributed to politics. Would that be the indirect pathway through which politics, confronted with the impossible, finds itself in ethics? These questions warrant examination.

The promise of politics is to strike a balance between personal happiness and the common good. The current tendency throughout the world is toward a liberalization of policies; generalized liberalism whose object par excellence in fantasy if not in the fetish of the political discourse is private ownership. The balance exacted between personal happiness and the common good in the political promise is thus a balance that turns principally on private ownership as such. In a sense it could be said that the premise of the promise is that private ownership would cover over the locatable contradiction between personal happiness and the common good. Private ownership is lifted to the status of a desirable object as a solution to a contradiction in current political discourse to the extent that a discourse can survive and maintain itself before the voters in a democratic perspective only as a promise of enhanced well-being.

But what is this contradiction at play in the political discourse? In its liberal electoralist version, the political discourse highlights the unbridgeable gap, from the subject's point of view, between so-called personal happiness and the common good. It

does so by stressing the difference rather than the contradiction. The liberal discourse would have us believe that there is a gap capable of being improved upon, not an insurmountable contradiction. Subtle and highly skillful economic maneuvering in such areas as taxes, job creation, support for various sectors in the national and regional economies and in public services would enable the gap to be managed and national riches to be better distributed.

Turning to the psychoanalytic problematics where *jouissance* is at stake as the cause, we are confronted with an unbridgeable gap? The rules governing economics as a scientific discipline and as a technology have not been tailored to respond to satisfying personal needs, and even less so to meeting the quest for impossible *jouissance* for those persons. But the fact does remain that when those subjects speak of economics, they do so by involving their own specific quest. Even the economic reality is predicated on fantasy, and thus the irrational dimension is paradoxically taken on by any economic consideration from the standpoint of the potential voter for whom the politician's message is directed.

The point of view of the "common good" is necessarily a statistical and scientific one, where consideration of the subject is unwanted and even heretical. The "common good" is the precise opposite of personal interest because the subjective dimension obliterates any possible objectivity in such an interest. Likewise, one must accept the obvious—that the very notion of private ownership is far from being subjectively insinuated in the political discourse. There is nothing subjective about private ownership; it must be objectifiable to be scientific. It is linked to economic and legal imperatives determining its exact scope in society independent of the ideas that each citizen may have of it and unrelated to any comparison with the object at stake in the *jouissance* for any given subject.

This "common good" in its economic sense and personal dimension of "private ownership" fails to respond to the fundamental question of the relationship of the subject to *jouissance* and to the impossible dimension where the relationship of the object of ownership substitutes for objects of need. This failure is of course structural and accounts for the impossible that the political discourse consists in repressing. The question thus arises as to whether this operation of repression is part and parcel of *jouissance* where the passion of politics is founded as one of its conditions. But the repression itself is only partial and thus hides a more

radical repression in liberalism, thanks to the historic failure of the socialist discourse. The liberal promise in fact erases the internal division in the notion of a common good, which is the contradiction that the notion is designed to expunge.

Private ownership as an objective concept carries with it a dichotomy that is removed between the individual in the social linkage and the subject in relation to *jouissance*. When only the individual is considered, the political promise erases the subject, and that exclusion becomes a necessary and sufficient condition to allow for the hope of a reduction in the insistence of *jouissance* whose demands are scattered throughout the filaments, ambiguities and objects of the social link. Lulling the subject to sleep and ensuring that s/he does not wake up thus becomes the driving force behind the discourse of a political promise, whether liberal or socialist.

The revolutionary discourse is one that seeks to waken the subject, and for that reason is dangerous and heretical. The only efficient counter-logic is to confront the subject prematurely with the violent return of the drives and to accuse the subject of stirring up this violence, which constitutes the return of the repressed. The nationalism of the former Eastern-bloc countries, the would-be religious fanaticism in the Middle East, and the political movements sustained by a supposedly new democratic problematics in Latin America—each signify in different manners and in varying contexts an unforeseen awakening that is accompanied by an unavoidable violence. It would be surprising to see international diplomacy, built on the exclusions of its promises of “well-being” and worldwide peace, be able to put down these forces that are now awakening abandoned subjectivities.

The erasing of subjectivities in the social link confirmed on the personal level by notions like “private ownership,” personal and collective “well-being,” and “social peace” may also be found at the collective level. The social relations of inequality are done away within the *jouissance* of rights, social injustice, poverty, and inequality in access to social and public services and in the economic strategies commonly referred to as equal opportunities. The blotting out of social relationships of inequality by resorting to equalizing economic schemes is embodied in the concept of “well-being,” where any apportioning for those included and excluded by the structure is done away with, so that the apportioning becomes scientifically and technically possible.

Thus, in the field of representation, the political discourse maintains a promise that cannot be kept. Today's political discourse dominates the entire field of representation and operates like a vacuum or vortex. It is a discourse that requires its visibility, and now it has the greatest array of production means to ensure that visibility. One could logically posit the following hypothesis as the most profitable and economical for an analysis of the field of representation: the visibility required by a discourse in the field of representation is directly proportional to the invisibility of what the discourse is intended to exclude from that field; showing more in order to hide better is the principle of what the discourse of a political promise requires of visibility in the field of representation. Both this principle and the visibility it requires are extraneous to the individual politician's intentions and wishes. A politician most certainly may be driven by the best of all possible intentions. What is involved, however, is the ordering of the promise as a political discourse in the structure of the field of representation as such.

### aesthetics against ethics

The media discourse takes after the visibility required in the field of representation, but it duplicates it with a criticism that, far from attacking and diminishing the visibility, promotes it. The visibility feeds the mass media discourse and, in so doing, blinds the media to the element of impossibility around which the political discourse of promise revolves. Media criticism always remains oblivious to the greatest weakness in the political discourse, which leaves unscathed the failure where the discourse is constantly unraveling and reweaving itself. The media discourse succeeds in unceasingly questioning the politician's *jouissance*, leaving for the individual what at the outset s/he is destined not to grasp on the level of structure. The politician's relationship to the political discourse is the particular relationship of an individual to the impossible in the social link. This impossible is embodied in the structure of the political discourse as a promise; it is not the subject's breaking point where *jouissance* has been made impossible by language. This distinction illustrates the extent of error in the media discourse. After leaving aside what constituted the structural failure of politics as a promise, it becomes concerned solely with the *jouissance* of the politician as the object of criticism.

Politics addresses the ethical questions posed by the media discourse arising from the errors found in their objects of criticism by resorting to a strategy of aesthetics. And this tactic is unavoidable because it is the only logical strategy within the structured field of representation. An aesthetics of representation, primarily in the ritualization of the staged political ploy, presents what the media sees as an exercise of democracy in its right to question and to criticize. The target is not the failing, which renders the politician's promise worthless, but the verbal performance of the politician, i.e., his or her relationship to the lack that nourishes the lust for power.

If it is true that the field of representation is dominated by the blinding of visibility in politics, then what does the media's strategy of ethical questioning bear on? The structural blindfold induced into the field of representation is based on the impossible at stake in the political promise. As repression of the impossible, the blinding is maintained outside the field of visibility by the created theatricalization, ritualization, and projection of events by the media to the entire nation. The media's ethical question therefore may never have any credible bearing on an object kept out of its reach by the very function that politics assigns to the media discourse of promoting the theatricalization of power on the national level.

What then does the ethical questioning focus on? Beyond what is presented as moral, above a system of implicit and explicit prohibition where the limits of acceptability in social relationships are conditioned, an ethics questions what appears as impossible. Morality attempts to confine the social link within the limits defined by prohibitions in their personal and legal implications. But over and above the social link, an ethics questions the impossibilities underlying the quest in human desire, i.e., what the human being cannot reject without giving up his or her status as human. The subject's demand in relation to the impossible is truly the site where historically s/he disputes and modifies the limits of orality but without abandoning the prohibited as a condition of the social link. Thus, in the field of representation, ethical questioning should address the conditions of impossibility underlying the political promise. Visibility staged as a political space makes this flaw in the political discourse the blind spot in the field of representation hidden by the theatricalization of power and the ritualization of the democratic process of political questioning.

The field of representation, reduced by the staging of political discourse, becomes a theater where interest in the behind-the-scenes and on-the-scene lifestyles and performances of its actors has been replaced by the anxiety the text was intended to sustain in the relationship of the spectator to the impossible. The structural shifting of criticism, from the impossibility at stake in the political promise to the *jouissance* sustaining the politician's quest for such an impossibility, determines the particulars governing the ethical questioning of the politician rather than the questioning of political discourse. In North America, the process takes place as if the political discourse were capable of standing on its own, not having to be questioned in its prerequisites and conditions of possibility.

The political discourse seems to determine the structure of the field of representation as a received discourse establishing the relative position of all others. To question the possible conditions of the political discourse is to tackle the entire field of representation as it itself is received. This would imply modifying the conditions for devising dominant currents such as the media's encapsulated mentality, the dominance of the feminist critique of human sciences, the dominance of biological and legal problematics in the realm of scientific justification so exaggerated in prevailing currents, and so on. The specific blinding of the structural contradiction between economics and social policies, which renders the promise of political discourse unfulfillable, corresponds to an equally specific repression of subjectivity in its insistence on desire and demand.

The repression of the subject, sustained in dominant currents by scientism and juridism, reduces the question of ethics to one of private morality projected onto the scene of representation as public visibility. The argument sustaining the questioning of moral visibility lies in a principle devised to fit these circumstances: the public has a right to know. Any media questioning of a politician is thus centered on private and public morality as the right of the public to know. But what it has a right to really know, the structural failure of the discourse of promises, the public will never know. The public will be either entertained or bored for want of being able to be informed about the structural limits of politics in human affairs. The entire ethical questioning supports and shores up the theatricalization of power and the ritualization of the democratic process as an aesthetics of political representation.



This “showing to hide” can achieve its objectivity only if it provides an aesthetic dimension to the visibility required for the political discourse, where the subject’s lack can be substituted for the structural failing. What is at stake in the aesthetics of politics is a specific prohibition—the prohibition of thinking! The psychoanalytic discourse, introducing the knowledge of analysis into the political field, constitutes the particular real of a *jouissance*—that promised by politics but that turns out to fail in the accompanying discourse. Applying psychoanalysis to the political discourse can only bring out the dominant function of the discourse in the field of representation, while at the same time it entraps *jouissance* motivating the impossibility inherent in that discourse.

The extension of psychoanalysis by its application to realms of discourse other than those related to the subject in transference can obviously not be affected without giving rise to specific epistemological difficulty. But those extension-related problems can be discussed and solved only in that very context. Applied to literature, theater, and film, psychoanalysis operates differently than when applied to painting, sculpture, or even music. Put another way, those fields of psychoanalytic extension impose on knowledge and on the theory of psychoanalysis the resistance of a real that is particular to each case—the real of *jouissance* itself at work in each domain where the subject of the word and desire finds that singular matter of identification to his or her own truth. The articles published in this volume are intended as a modest contribution to this emerging undertaking that extends the work of psychoanalytic knowledge outside the social kind of transference structured by the response that the analyst’s desire prompts from the drive.